

# **Promoting Peace Among Youth Through Sports** By Prachi

## **What is promoting peace among youth through sports?**

Humanity is currently experiencing a period of difficult and turbulent coexistence. Much of this is the result of a lack of dialogue, knowledge and exchanges between people, a lack that is sometimes the cause of the misunderstandings that often lead to conflict.

Peace among and within nations is a fundamental human aspiration and a primary goal of the global development community. History is full of evidence that Sports work primarily by bridging relationships across social, economic and cultural divides within society, and by building a sense of shared identity and fellowship among groups that might otherwise be inclined to treat each other with distrust, aggression or violence.

During World War I, there were a number of recorded occasions where troops left the trenches and became friends with the enemy, before returning to fight the war again.

More recently there are cases where the country of Sri Lanka stopped its bitter civil war to watch the nation's cricket matches, where South Korea and Japan join forces to host a World Cup (an event which saw a Japanese Emperor on Korean soil for the first time in half a century), and India plays cricket against Pakistan.

Sports also give countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq a chance to give their country an image of more than a war torn country. Afghanistan was a whisker away from qualifying for the ICC Twenty 20 World Cup and Iraq won the soccer Asian Cup. This raised the spirits of the nations.

If North Korea and USA draw each other in any sports event, it would be a great chance for the two countries to show on a huge stage that they can be civil and have a tough and fair, sporting competition.

Sports have a crucial role to play in the efforts of the United Nations to improve the lives of people around the world. By conveying the ethics of sport, it also lays the foundations for a more peaceful, and humane world.

In this third millennium, it is increasingly clear that sports can and must play the role of sparkplug within our society. More than ever, sports are by its very essence the only language understood by all. It is a common denominator that breaks down all the barriers.

The good thing about sports is that everyone can exercise sports, regardless of political ideas, race, or religion and capable of uniting when nationalities, politics, religions and cultures all too often divide. It teaches respect and tolerance, two values that are indispensable to our world today.

## **What has your country, other countries/the UN done about this problem already? Has it worked?**

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Prior to the 1997 General Election in Britain, the Labour Party stated, “Sports can be crucial to the social and personal development of young people. By participating in sporting activities they can learn to differentiate between good and bad behavior”. The Labour Party declared that if they were elected they would “develop sporting opportunities for young people to help them foster a sense of their value to society and to help tackle problems of youth crime.

After the Labour Party was elected in 1997, the British government started supporting sport programs for at-risk youth. The organizing committee for the London 2012 Olympic games is currently promoting the importance of sport for at-risk youth. Many great athletes from the United Kingdom have spoken publicly about how sport probably helped keep them away from criminal activities.

Other world leaders have used sports as means to make peacemaking international gestures. The Chinese government famously invited American Ping-Pong players to exhibition matches in China in April 1971, the first time Americans were allowed into the country since 1949. And sure enough, within a year of China’s “Ping-Pong diplomacy,” President Richard Nixon made his own historic trip to China, ending two decades of unfriendly relations between the two superpowers.

A person proposed to no longer use national anthems during the Olympic games, in order to highlight that the competition in sports is about competing athletes, not about competing nations.

Several UN organizations are already utilizing the mobilizing values of sport to raise awareness about issues, and as a tool to help accomplish their missions in a variety of fields, from improving health and education, to promoting tolerance and respect for human rights.

NGOs are well positioned to facilitate the process of relationship building by bringing people together and engaging them in dialogue and programs that cross miscellaneous boundaries.

### **What could be done?**

We do not need to wait every four years, for the Olympic games to promote peace through sports. More and more regional, national and multinational sporting events should be organized frequently to keep the youth engaged in the field.

“ When one is active in sports, one does not commit genocide.” “The more we sweat in peace, the less we bleed in war.”

Countries should be encouraged to compete in sports, and view that as a way to beat “the enemy”. Countries like Somalia can find an identity in any World Sport to promote peace. Zimbabwe should be allowed to compete at cricket despite having Robert Mugabe as a president.

The popularity of sporting celebrities can be used to make peace and sports better known, since they are the role models, heroes and a source of inspiration for young

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people throughout the world. They can be extremely influential spokespeople for peace and serve, at times, as intermediaries between hostile nations, creating openings for dialogue.

Engage boys and girls in their communities and provide them with sport and play activities that promote peace building and the use of non-violent conflict resolution techniques and reconcile differences in their communities. This technique can change in the way they interact with their peers, teachers and at home, and in the way they approach problems. They can learn how to better communicate and express their feelings, and be more tolerant of others.

Facilitate and award the sport personalities for their contribution in making peace.

Developing peace games for kids.